



Meeting Overload

Companies need to set agendas and time limits for meetings.

By Tom Comi

PhoneSmart Director Tron Jordheim walked into his conference room recently with three of his 110 employees and discovered that all four of them thought they were there for a different meeting than one another.

“That is meeting overload,” he said, referring to a common affliction that affects many companies throughout the country.

And we’ve all been there. You’re busy working away at your desk when an email alert reminds you to head to your respective company’s conference room. You grab your coffee, a notebook and a pen, and you trudge down the hall. Upon arriving, somebody finally chimes in with the question everybody’s been thinking: “Why are we here?”

“To be honest, I’m not a big fan of meetings,” said Mako Steel President Caesar Wright, who has 14 employees. “Don’t get me wrong, there is a time and place for them; but for the most part, I find communication with my staff can be achieved quicker and more efficiently with a one-on-one update that should last no longer than 10 minutes.”

More and more, it seems that companies are thinking like Wright. Not only does it allow them to focus more on the specific person/people a topic affects, but it doesn’t waste the valuable time of those who aren’t involved.

“Without question, smaller meetings are more effective,” he said. “There is no purpose, in my opinion, to have certain staff members involved in a meeting that has nothing to do with their role at Mako Steel.”

Jordheim agrees. He likes meetings to stay on point and to only include those who need to be there.

“Usually we do smaller meetings about specific topics or issues,” he explained. “We rarely do large, all-hands meetings. When we do those meetings, they are for quick informational purposes.”

A Game Plan

Paul Slezak, co-founder and head of service for Recruit Loop, which has offices in San Francisco and Australia, said on his company’s website that every meeting must have a purpose: “Why is the meeting being held? Is it just because you always have one, or is there an actual reason for dragging everyone into the same room and putting the outside world on hold for an hour?”

“Team goals should actually be at the heart of every meeting,” he wrote. “If your goal is to make more sales, then everything discussed at the meeting should reflect this in some way.”

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One way to avoid unnecessary or rambling meetings is to come up with an agenda. Jordheim said his rule of thumb is to “make them quick and make them good.” That might be easier said than done, but it can be accomplished with an outline and a good leader.

“Keep the meeting on topic,” he said. “Don’t be afraid to interrupt people who are straying off topic. We always try to finish before the slotted end time.”

Slezak explained that an agenda with a detailed list of what you want to discuss will help keep things on track.

“They should start on time and only go for the allotted time,” he wrote. “If some items on the agenda require more time than is available, they should be moved to the next meeting or, if urgent, a separate meeting should be held with those immediately involved.”

Meetings should also be held regularly and on the same day every week if possible, he said, adding, “Meetings that are called at the last minute or constantly postponed are an indication that you do not have respect for your team, as they all have their own agendas to meet outside of your meetings.”

Wright said Mako Steel has two meetings a week, both of which have a 30-minute time limit. He agrees that it’s crucial to have a purpose for gathering and to stick to that purpose.



“You have to listen to your employees [during meetings]. That’s the most important thing. Without them, Mako Steel does not exist.”

~ Caesar Wright, Mako Steel

Engaging Your Employees

We’ve all been to those meetings where the person who called everybody together rambles on non-stop. Not only does it force people to tune out, but it accomplishes no interaction or new ideas.

“You have to listen to your employees,” Wright said. “That’s the most important thing. Without them, Mako Steel does not exist.”

Slezak said it’s crucial to get every employee at the meeting involved, otherwise they are wasting their time by being there.

“You can go around the table to get everyone’s input,” he wrote. “You can also mix up the roles, so that it is not just your jaw flapping all the time. People will become genuinely enthused about your meetings if they are encouraged to participate and can see that something is actually being achieved. They will begin to take ownership of the meetings by turning up on time and contributing to the discussion.”

Another way to get employees involved, he said, is to assign a different person to take the minutes every meeting. Not only are these a good way of recounting what took place, but they will be a good reminder when emailed out of what each person’s tasks are for follow-up meetings.

With more and more people telecommuting and traveling, it’s important to keep all employees in the loop. Thanks to modern technology—including GoToMeeting.com, FaceTime, WebEx.com, Skype and other programs—that is very easy these days.

“People can participate from various locations, using their smart phones or tablets to log into a central meeting site,” Slezak wrote, before admitting that it does take some getting used to. “Running a team meeting of this kind calls for strict etiquette to be observed by everyone. This includes always saying your name before you speak and avoiding talking over the top of others.”

Jordheim and Wright both stressed the importance of including remote employees in meetings to make sure they feel like they are in the loop and part of the team.

“We’ve had a lot of success with utilizing FaceTime,” Wright said, “especially with our crews in the field.” ❖

A vertical advertisement for U-Haul Self-Storage Affiliate Network. The top section is black with the U-Haul logo in white. Below that is an orange banner with the text "YOUR SELF-STORAGE PARTNER" in white and yellow. The middle section is white with the text "FEATURING" in blue, a small image of a storage unit, and the "webselfstorage" logo. To the right is a QR code and the text "ONE PLACE TO GO FOR EVERYTHING YOU NEED." The bottom section is orange with the text "MAKE MORE, PAY LESS AND COMPETE WITH THE BIG GUYS.™" in white, the phone number "(866) 693-6683", and the website "webselfstorage.com". At the very bottom, it says "Powered by U-HAUL" and "SSA Globe ©2014 U-Haul International".